

New Caledonia

Clearance formalities completed, Fathom departed Vuda marina, Fiji, on 20th October bound for New Caledonia, 850 nautical miles to the WSW. Conditions were lively as the reef pass was transited just before dark, 25 knots of wind and a lumpy sea making it difficult to settle into the rhythm of sailing again. The next day wasn't much better I felt lethargic and not in great spirits but progress was good with a daily run of 130nm. The conditions moderated over the next couple of days until the 24th when ahead of a weak trough the wind died completely and I was forced to use the engine for 30 hours straight. Morning of the 25th I headed into the cockpit at first light to see a large bird sat on the starboard cockpit seat, clearly in need of a rest. I offered it a sumptuous breakfast of soy milk or water, biscuit crumbs or bread crumbs (yes I gave it a choice) but it wasn't interested in any and instead reacted to my generosity by taking another crap. It had also chosen to sit on two of the reefing lines for the mainsail so after giving it another three hours grace, with the wind building, I persuaded it to fly home so I could shorten sail.



heading out through the pass in Fiji

Entry into the pass at the south of New Caledonia at first light on the 26th presented no problems and a nice day was spent sailing the 30 or so miles through the channels in flat water to the marina at the large town of Noumea. Already arrived were my friends Alex and David from Bonavallete and Julius from yacht Trinidad plus there were lots of familiar faces. The following few days were spent becoming reacquainted with excellent french cuisine, the odd pint or two, and working through a boat job list in preparation for a potentially tough sail to Australia.



rig check in New Caledonia

For the first time since leaving the U.K I chose to get some professional weather advice for the next leg and was informed that anytime from the 1st to the 3rd of November was good to depart on the 950 mile trip to Coff's harbour on the East Coast of Australia and would ensure me a good window to arrive. It was a shame to leave so soon and not see more of New Cal but cyclone season was fast approaching and I was keen to keep moving. So on the morning of 1st November, with clearance formalities completed, Fathom and Bonavalette headed out of the pass into open ocean once more. Little did I know it wasn't going to be smooth sailing, in fact, far from it.